



**Office of the Attorney General  
Paul G. Summers**

**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 25, 2005

Number #05-19

CONTACT:

Sharon Curtis-Flair

(615) 741-5860

**TN ATTY GEN ASKS COUNTRY MUSIC ARTIST GRETCHEN WILSON TO STOP  
PROMOTING USE OF SMOKELESS TOBACCO TO YOUTH**

Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers is asking country music artist Gretchen Wilson to stop promoting the use of smokeless tobacco to youth at her concerts.

Today, General Summers wrote a letter to the artist regarding the promotion of Skoal smokeless tobacco in a song entitled, "Skoal Ring," that she is currently performing as part of the "Somewhere in the Sun" concert tour that included a performance in Memphis. While performing the song on stage, Wilson removes a can of Skoal from her pocket, which is prominently shown on jumbo screens throughout the venue. The audience generally includes a large number of young people under the age of 18.

"As the Attorney General of the home state of country music, I want to discuss my concerns of your promotion of smokeless products, particularly as it relates to the youth who attend your concerts and who listen to your music," Attorney General Summers wrote. "My Office is concerned about this issue because of the relatively high use of smokeless tobacco products among youth in Tennessee."

The company that manufactures Skoal, the United States Smokeless Tobacco Company, has signed the Smokeless Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, which prohibits targeting youth for tobacco product sales. Attorney General Summers is also contacting the manufacturer about the use of its products at Wilson's concerts.

Attorney General Summers said while he appreciates Gretchen Wilson's work as an artist, he has requested she consider the potential negative impact that displaying smokeless tobacco products during her concerts may have on youth. He has asked Wilson to discontinue displaying tobacco products during her concerts and to make public statements about the hazards of using smokeless tobacco.

General Summers told the artist in the letter that "as adults we can make our own health decisions, including whether to use tobacco products, however, young people, including many of your fans, are prohibited from using these products under Tennessee law." Further, "you are a role model for the youth of this country. Many young people attend your concerts and purchase your music and t-shirts. Because your actions strongly influence the youth in your

audiences and who listen to your music, I ask you to take steps to warn young people of the negative health effects of smokeless tobacco use, and to avoid ‘glamorizing’ and ‘normalizing’ the use of smokeless tobacco products.”

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) studies show teens are twice as likely to use smokeless tobacco as the overall population. Another report shows the particularly high use of smokeless tobacco by young Tennesseans. A May 2004, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, available at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5302.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5302.pdf) found that 21.4% of male high school students in Tennessee used smokeless tobacco products during the past 30 days. The CDC reports that smokeless tobacco use can lead to nicotine addiction and adolescents who use smokeless tobacco are more likely to become cigarette smokers.